



BOOK ILLUSTRATION IN INDIA AS A PROFESSION

—JAGDISH JOSHI*

The history of book illustration in India is quite old. Ancient handwritten manuscripts are available even today. Illustrations have been used in the manuscripts of Mughal period in various ways. In some cases, these manuscripts have been decorated just by the illustrations of flowers and leaves and animals and birds. And in some cases, the incidents have been beautifully depicted through pictures.

However, since those manuscripts were handwritten, their usefulness was confined only to some people who belonged to the aristocratic class.

Even the artist had to depend on these handful of people for their livelihood. For the artists of those days, art was a *sadhana* rather than a profession. Or else, they were compelled to continue their family tradition.

In course of time, the art of printing developed. Books began reaching the common people. That also led to the disintegration of traditional art. In those days, printing colour illustrations used to be very difficult

and expensive. The publishers were forced to confine themselves to one-colour illustrations. But I would like to state that it was an unfortunate situation for the artists. While formerly, the artist was dependent on the support of the rich nobleman, he is now being measured by his commercial viability.

In course of time, art of book illustration ceased to be a *sadhana* and became an ordinary profession. The artists collapsed under the burden of their egos and their own values and started getting diffused.

With the advance of time, there was multi-faceted progress in the field of printing. In place of letter press, offset and other printing processes developed and came to be widely used. Books began being colourful, swelling the ranks of the specialists who used those colours. They came to be known as commercial artists who pursued art and made it their profession at the same time.

Profession and art are two different fields. I have been lucky enough to have the opportunity of meeting a large number of artists in India and abroad. But I could

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hardly meet anyone who could justify the name of a professional artist. I have always noticed that the scales of profession and art constantly swing up and down.

An artist cannot become a professional and he has been paying the price for it all the time. Although the artists are in greater demand for book illustration, few artists are ready to enter this field. In foreign countries, illustrators enjoy rights of royalty and copyright. If, under some special situation, the publisher wishes to buy the illustrator's copyright, he is required to pay the artist a much larger sum than he would have normally paid. But in the case of Indian illustrators, the question of copyright does not arise at all. Their illustrations are bought for a pittance. In some fields, the remunerations for illustrations have been fixed. I would like to cite some instances in this connection. The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) had prepared a list of illustrations in 1961. Subsequently, the list was revised in 1985 as a result of the efforts of Mr. C.N. Rao of the NCERT. Around the same time, the Publications Division and other government organizations followed suit. An illustrator may take five days or five minutes to make an illustration, it may be the work of an established artist or a novice, every illustration is valued by the same uniform yardstick. Under these circumstances, whether the illustrator takes five days or five minutes, depends on his own devotion to his art.

Today, an illustrator is known by his portfolio. That alone is his accumulated wealth. He can earn money by selling his original works or using them in some other way. But an Indian illustrator possesses only some press clippings or unpublished illustration which are of no use. In this context, I would like to narrate a small incident. Once the Executive Director of the ACCU, Mr. Sasoka, was a guest at my place. He expressed a desire to see some of my ori-

ginal art work. But I did not have with me any of my original works. Hence, I had to content myself with showing him some published book which I had illustrated. But, for Mr. Sasoka, it was probably the first experience to meet an illustrator who did not have the originals in his possession.

In many countries, there are schemes of national and international awards for promoting and encouraging illustrators. But we have no such scheme in our country at present. Many years ago, the National Book Trust had announced a scheme of national awards for illustrators. But nothing was heard about it after that.

I am proud that many illustrations of our country have won awards and honours in foreign countries. Many books illustrated by them have been published in foreign countries and they have also received praises. But it is not the question of winning awards or getting the books published outside the country. The important point is that Indian illustrators should be accorded due honour and respect and these should be granted their legitimate rights.

Publishing in India has made great progress. The latest printing technology has become an integral part of publishing industry. But book illustration has not yet been professionally modernized. There are several progressive publishing houses like the Ratna Sagar, Frank Brothers, Children's Book Trust, National Book Trust and others engaged in publication of children's books. They publish children's books of very good quality. In order to maintain their modern tradition and their own standards of publication, the publishing houses should realize that it is their responsibility to see that the illustrator get their legitimate dues and their rights are recognised. It is hoped that during this Seminar, both the problems of illustrators of children's books as well as their solutions are clearly presented.

(Translated from the original in Hindi)